



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

James Tedisco

## Tedisco, Fahy Call for Passage of Jacobe's Law to Ensure Schools Notify Parents When Their Children Are Bullied

SENATOR JIM TEDISCO May 7, 2018

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Senator Jim Tedisco (R,C,I,REF-Glenville) and Assemblymember Patricia Fahy (D-Albany) today joined with Christine and Richard Taras, the parents of 13-year-old Jacobe Taras of Fort Edward, who tragically took his own life as a result of bullying, to call for passage of their legislation, "Jacob's Law," to require that schools notify parents when a child is being threatened by a bully.

“Jacobe’s Law” (S.1355B/A.8114B), which passed the Senate this year by a vote of 59-0, requires that school employees charged with receiving reports of harassment, bullying or discrimination contact the parents or guardians of the students involved – both the bullies and victims -- when an incident of bullying or harassment occurs.

In 2012, the Dignity for All Students Act became law as a means to address bullying in our schools. Although schools are required to report incidents to the state Education Department, the Dignity for All Students Act does not require schools to alert parents when their child has been bullied or is believed to be the perpetrator of bullying. Rather, the law currently leaves it up to each school district to decide whether they will or will not notify parents of children involved in an incident of bullying. This serious gap in state law has led to fatal consequences.

Jacobe’s parents say they were not notified by his school of the extent of bullying he faced. This was not an isolated incident as there are many heartbreaking stories of young people injuring themselves, or worse yet, taking their own lives because of bullying.

“If your child was bullied in school, wouldn’t you want to know? That’s the question, I’ve asked scores of parents, education officials and my colleagues over the past few months and not a single person has said, ‘no, I’d rather not know.’ Unfortunately, due to a loophole in state law, many parents are not being kept informed about incidents of bullying taking place at our schools,” said Senator Tedisco, who served close to a decade as a special education teacher and guidance counselor and has a master’s degree in special education.

“No student should have to deal with bullying. Too often, in what should be a safe place for learning, children are exposed to the harmful effects of bullying. I’m thankful for the advocacy of the Taras family in their push to require schools to notify parents in instances of bullying,” said Assemblymember Fahy.

“Parents have a right to know what's going on with their children as our schools should be safe places for children to enjoy learning and not fear for their physical and emotional well-being. Bullying is not ‘kids just being kids,’ it’s abusive behavior that can have devastating and potentially fatal consequences as my family knows all too well,” said Christine Taras, Jacobe’s mother. “If we had known what was going on behind school and bus doors, which was detailed in Jacobe’s suicide note, we know he would still be with us today. Now all we have are our broken hearts and memories. We thank Senator Tedisco and Assemblymember Fahy for their leadership in sponsoring this bill. The Senate has done its job, we now ask that the Assembly bring this common sense bill forward for a vote. We hope Jacobe’s story can help lead to positive change and save lives.”

Bullying is defined based on what’s listed under the [Dignity for All Students Act](#) and what incidences schools are currently required to report to the New York State Education Department.

Senator Tedisco noted that at a state budget hearing this year, [State Education Commissioner MaryEllen Elia expressed her support](#) for parents being notified if their children are involved in an incident of bullying.

“If the statistics and incidences of bullying are important enough to report to the administrators at State Ed, then they are urgent enough to make parents aware of to intervene to develop a plan of action and potentially help avert a tragedy. My heart goes out to the Taras family and all the families that have faced this devastating tragedy related to bullying. I can only hope that through ‘Jacobese Law’ we can bring about a positive change that can involve parents in helping to stop bullying and save lives,” said Tedisco.

